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ABSTRACT

This article highlights the sources and methods that will help the adult educator discover ideas that can be developed into unsolicited proposals for the funding of projects. The following sources of ideas are listed: colleagues and friends, literature reviews, current events in the popular press, speeches by noted authorities, proceedings of learned societies, and funding agencies. Generating ideas alone is then suggested. The steps in the clustering technique, a nonlinear brainstorming process similar to free association, are described. Starting an idea file is then suggested as an organized means for storage and retrieval. Incubation is recommended as the final step. (YLB)

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TECHNIQUES: METHODS FOR IDENTIFYING IDEAS FOR SPONSORED PROJECTS

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Most of the energy spent in proposal writing workshops and textbooks highlights the mechanics of converting an existing idea into a proposal that will get funding. Other authors have provided an excellent cookbook approach to developing existing ideas into sponsored projects. This article will highlight the sources and methods that will help the adult educator discover ideas that can be developed into unsolicited proposals.

Ideas-Ideas-Ideas

Sources of Ideas. Ideas for sponsored projects come from many sources. Experienced proposal developers have often found their ideas don't originate with themselves and often come from:

- looking in their own backyard (where they work and live);
- talking with colleagues and friends;
- literature reviews;
- current events reported in the popular press;
- speeches delivered by noted authorities often provide a commentary on what needs to be done in the future;
- proceedings of learned societies;
- themes identified in up-coming convention announcements;
- funding agencies themselves.

The above list provides a rich resource for ideas for sponsored projects. An investigator can build on someone else's ideas or can set forth on his or her own. If the decision is made to not build on others' ideas, the investigator may want to use one of the following suggestions to get started.

Suggestion I-Generating Ideas (Alone). Tapping and developing ideas can be a difficult process. Individuals seem to get stuck when they sit down to write because they think they should know where to start and what ideas to develop. Recent brain research has demonstrated that this is a natural state of the beginning of most creative acts. There are a variety of techniques that have been developed from this new information about the creative process.

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One technique that suggests some promise is a process called clustering or mapping. The term *clustering* was coined by Rico (1983) and is considered a nonlinear brainstorming process that is similar to free association.

Using Clustering-Steps

1. Put a nucleus word or phrase, circled, in the center of a fresh piece of paper. The word can be anything from a client, to a group, to an organizational circumstance, or situation. There is no wrong starting point. (If you aren't feeling terribly creative, start with any word that comes to you concerning a problem you feel needs solving. This is the premise on which all proposals are written.) If the investigator starts with something that isn't a problem, it may develop into areas that haven't been considered for problem-solution and therefore break new ground for sponsored projects.

2. When another word comes into your head, write it down rapidly, circle it, and connect it with an arrow to the nucleus. Don't analyze or censor the words in your cluster and don't share your clusters with anyone. If a participant plans to share his or her cluster or is prematurely analytical, this most times has a stifling effect on creativity.

3. Continue to do this for at least ten minutes. Expect to have some of the time spent not writing. During this time darken the lines between circles or shade portions. More ideas should begin to flow.

4. Then start to write; the words will come. It may be necessary to repeat this process in order to develop a specific problem and then to repeat it again to develop alternative solutions. (See Rico's text for more detailed instructions and a series of exercises to develop your skills in using this technique.)

Whether ideas have been generated by individuals or in groups through brainstorming, there will need to be some organized means for storage and retrieval.

Suggestion II: Start an Idea file. Ideas for sponsored programs can occur at the strangest times - while working on an unrelated problem, at the movies, driving, at staff meetings, etc. If you have an organized system for storing these ideas - you are well on your way to action.

Start a file. The file may consist of a notebook, a series of 3 x 5 index cards, or a file folder. What is important is that you get your ideas recorded. If your energy level is high, each idea could be outlined to consider the problem, why it might be important, what you will do, and the outcome you expect. A file folder may be desirable for many individuals because they can also include copies of articles that are related to the topic. Whatever system is used, there needs to be a periodic (monthly) review of the ideas for sponsored projects

What's Next?

Incubation. The investigator's ideas need to have an incubation period before they can be translated into a problem-solution statement. It is important not to structure the idea too soon. Allow time for the creative processes to work.

Helpful Resources

Osborn, A. F. (1963). *Applied imagination: Principles and procedures of creative problem-solving* (3rd ed.). New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Rico, G. L. (1983). *Writing the natural way.* Los Angeles, CA: J. P. Tarcher, Inc.